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ABSTRACT

Four hundred eight female users of cosmetics in Madison, Wisconsin, responded to questionnaires which sought to discover correlations among the goal of the purchaser and the type and source of information sought in the buying decision. Two goals were identified: rational (cost, functional benefits of product, or possible undesirable consequences from use of the product) and social (conformity to perceived expectations of others). Users who have specific goals seek evaluative information of one sort or another. For instance, those who have social goals tend to depend on others' opinions for information and are apt to rely on the mass media. Consumers with economic goals are apt to prefer print advertisements, and those who perceive performance risk are likely to view salespeople as important information sources. The more important the buying situation is perceived to be by the consumer, the more apt she is to take the initiative to seek information and to evaluate alternatives. (TJ)

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CONSUMER BUYING GOALS AND COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR

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Communicators and communication researchers have traditionally considered the communication process a one-way street--with the communicator doing the influencing and the audience being influenced or persuaded. Recent research, however, shows that consumers are not passive recipients of information thrust upon them by a variety of sources. Consumers often take a good deal of initiative in the communication process and actively seek information, even determining the extent to which they will be influenced by various types of information from different sources (Bauer, 1963; Cox, 1963; Newman and Lockeman, 1972).

When are consumers likely to take the initiative in the communication process? What determines consumer preferences for kinds and sources of information? The findings presented in this paper help answer such questions for cosmetics buyers. The results add to the limited amount of literature on the information-seeking model (Cox, 1963) and shed light on certain hypotheses about differential preferences for amounts, kinds, and sources of information.

In the context of communication effects, the findings are of added interest because they provide some evidence as to the validity of existing models of communication process. For example, they suggest when communication may operate in a stimulus-response fashion and when through mediating processes (Klapper, 1960; Krugman, 1965).

Background

Bauer (1964, 1967) observed that most consumer research is based upon two types of human behavior models: (1) the "rational" model used by people such as economists, which assumes that the consumer's goal in

the buying situation is to maximize his utility by carefully calculating alternatives according to his tastes and their relative prices; and (2) the "nonrational" or social influence model used by behavioral scientists, which assumes that man's wants and behavior are geared to emulating others and conforming to generally accepted norms.

Based upon the assumption that consumer behavior is goal oriented, communication has been viewed as a commodity consumed by buyers in their process of identifying and satisfying their buying goals (Bauer, 1963; Cox, 1963). Thus, what is viewed by the advertiser as "persuasion" may be viewed by the consumer as a decision to use certain information that will help her make a better decision.

This study follows Bauer's and Cox's reasoning; it assumes that the buyer's communication behavior is a direct outgrowth of her goals in the buying situation. The conception of "buying goals" which is used in this study is similar to that of Bauer (1964, 1967): in the buying situation some people are more concerned with evaluating product features and some more with pleasing others by emulating people or groups in their environment. Although it is acknowledged that consumers may respond passively to communication at times, the main interest of this study is in the behavior which is motivated by, and differentially dependent upon, the consumer's "rational" and "social" goal orientations in a buying situation.

Previous research suggests that a rational goal orientation is present in the buying situation when the consumer evaluates and buys products on the basis of their relative price, and when she is concerned about the realization of the product's functional benefits and possible undesirable consequences (Cox, 1967b; Bauer, 1967). These

two orientations (economic and performance) are operationally defined in this study in terms of two variables, price consciousness and performance-perceived risk, respectively.

A social-goal orientation, on the other hand, is assumed to be present when the buyer behaves according to a social influence model, that is, when she desires to conform to the perceived expectations of others and when she depends upon others for advice and guidance (Cox, 1967a). These social influence processes are operationally defined respectively in terms of normative and informational social influence in decision making (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955).

In the present research, our interest in on certain criterion variables: amount of information used, preferences for kinds of information, preferences for sources of information, and opinion leadership. We expect our criterion variables to relate to the four variables that define the buyer's goals or degree of involvement in the purchasing decision (Robertson, 1973; Chaffee and McLeod, 1973).

Hypotheses

Results of previous studies show that information seeking is a function of the buyer's perception of the importance of price in decision making (Newman and Lockeman, 1972). Those who are price conscious may also use the media to find out about bargains and may evaluate products on the basis of their objective attributes, especially price (Wells and Tigert, 1971).

Research by Cox (1967b) suggests that when buyers perceive performance risk in the purchase decision they have the need for information on product performance from personal (formal and informal) sources of communication, and they are least likely to "trust" sources of

information that have low confidence value such as the mass media. The process of risk reduction often involves information seeking on the part of the buyer, who may develop some expertise as a result of this activity and be sought by others for information about products (Cox, 1967b).

Normative social influence in the buying situation suggests the presence of social risk and, therefore, the buyer's need for "social" information mainly from informal personal sources (Cox, 1967a; 1967b). Those who desire to conform to the perceived expectations of others may also pay attention to the media to form impressions of what kinds of people buy certain products or brands and develop associations of products or brands with various life styles (Ogilvy, 1963). They may also use this information to manipulate the impressions others have of them (Ward and Gibson, 1969).

Finally, informational social influence in the buying decision is a basic assumption of the information-seeking model, which emphasizes the complementary use of formal and informal channels in the communication process. The model seems to apply not only to the "audience" but also to "opinion leaders" (Reynolds and Darden, 1971).

The above research suggested the following hypotheses:

H_1: Price consciousness correlates positively with (a) information seeking, (b) preference for objective information, and (c) mass media credibility.

H_2: Performance risk correlates positively with (a) information seeking, (b) preference for objective information, (c) informal source credibility, (d) formal personal source credibility, (e) opinion leadership, and it correlates negatively with (f) mass media credibility.

H_3: Normative social influence correlates positively with (a) information seeking, (b) preference for social information, (c) informal source credibility, (d) mass media credibility, (e) use of specialized media, and (f) opinion leadership.

H_4: Informational social influence correlates positively with (a) information seeking, (b) preferences for social information, (c) informal source credibility, (d) formal personal source credibility, (e) mass media credibility, and (f) opinion leadership.

Methods

Data for this study were collected via questionnaires distributed to female users of cosmetics in Madison, Wisconsin, during the month of November 1974. Parking lanes and stalls in the city's three main shopping centers were selected at random as locations to approach prospective sampling subjects. Random selection of patrons of selected stores in the downtown area was also utilized as a sampling procedure. During various days of the week and during business hours, questionnaires were issued to 408 women who stated that they were using cosmetics and agreed to cooperate. A respondent was included in the final sample if she indicated that she had been using at least three of the following five products: perfume, face makeup base, hand cream or lotion, and at least one eye makeup product. These five products were selected on the basis of previous research (Wells, 1967), pretests, and interviews with salespeople. The 206 respondents in the final sample were actually using, on the average, 4.5 of these five products.

Variables in this research consisted of scales formed by summing several items. The procedure for developing the scales was to factor-analyze items relevant to the areas of priori interest where appropriate. Items which failed to load significantly (.50 or greater) on the

hypothesized factor were discarded and remaining items were summed to form the scale. Appendix A shows the variables used in this research, along with their operational definition and measurement.

Active or Passive Audience?

Of primary concern in this research was the extent to which the audience takes the initiative in the communication process; or, to put it somewhat differently, whether and under what conditions the information-seeking model describes how communication works.

The positive relationships between measures of buying goals and information seeking shown in Table 1 suggest that the buyer's desire to seek information prior to purchase depends upon (1) the extent to which she is concerned about the realization of the product's functional benefits and undesirable consequences; (2) when she desires to conform to the perceived expectations of others; and (3) when she depends upon others for advice and guidance (hypotheses 2a, 3a, 4a). Overall, the data show that the more involved a consumer is in her purchase decision the more likely she is to seek information. Thus, the information-seeking model may describe the communication process to the extent to which a consumption situation is important to the audience.

Hierarchical Response?

The information-seeking model further posits a hierarchical response pattern known to most marketers. The consumer is assumed to pass through a cognitive level, an effective level, and an action level on her way to purchasing a product. She needs information about the availability or awareness of a product, reasons to become interested in it, and information which will help her evaluate the product in terms of its ability to satisfy her buying goals (Cox, 1963, pp. 62-63).

The positive relationships between measures of consumer-buying goals and evaluative information show that the buyer's need for evaluative information is a function of the extent to which she has specific goals in the buying situation (Table 1). "Objective" information is preferred to the extent to which buyers have rational goals in the buying situation (hypotheses 1b and 2b), and "social" information when she has social buying goals (hypotheses 3b and 4b). The significant relationship between the consumer's concern about the performance of new cosmetic products and social information further suggests that buyers may attempt to reduce performance risk by observing the behavior of certain reference groups.

These findings suggest that the extent to which consumers evaluate products prior to purchase and, therefore, move through the affective stage in a hierarchical fashion may depend upon the amount at stake or degree of ego-involvement in the buying decision. In the absence of buying goals, the hierarchy may collapse, and awareness and trial may be the only necessary stages preceding adoption (repeat purchase).

Source Preference

Another concern of this study was to determine to what extent buying goals affect preferences for sources of information. The results in Table 1 show that informal channels are preferred only to the extent to which the buyer depends upon others for advice and guidance in decision making (hypothesis 4c). Those who rely on informal channels are also likely to rely on the media (hypothesis 4e). This latter finding is in line with Cox's (1963) contention about the complementary role of formal and informal channels in the communication process.

Print advertisements are also likely to be "trusted" by those consumers whose goals in the buying situation are influenced by group norms (hypothesis 3d). This finding, along with the significant relationship found between use of specialized media (fashion magazines) and nomative social goals (hypothesis 3e), further suggests that consumers who desire to conform to the perceived expectations of others may rely on the media for information concerning the various life styles portrayed through the use of specific products or brands. Thus, the media may be successful in manipulating consumers' perceptions and desires for products only to the extent to which consumers are concerned with group norms.

Finally, consumers with economic goals prefer print advertisements (hypothesis 1c), while buyers who perceive performance risk are likely to view salespeople as important information sources (hypothesis 2d). The latter finding is consistent with results of previous research by Cox (1967b).

Opinion Leadership

Cosmetics-opinion leadership correlated strongly with normative social goals (hypothesis 3f). This finding tends to support the contention that opinion leaders are usually supernormative group members (Klapper, 1960, p. 460). Opinion leaders in cosmetics are also susceptible to informational social influence (hypothesis 4f), a finding which is in line with previous research results on fashion opinion leadership (Reynolds and Darden, 1971).

Discussion

The results of this study suggest some interesting implications for m rketing strategy and communication research. First, when the buying situation is important to her, the consumer may take the initiative to seek information and evaluate alternatives prior to purchase. Under such conditions, the information-seeking model could best describe the communication process.

For unimportant decisions, on the other hand, the consumer may be passive in the communication process. However, it would be inaccurate to believe in a two-step flow of communication in the absence of buying goals. The idea that people are constantly talking about consumption matters or visually checking the consumption patterns of their friends overstates the reality (Robertson, 1973). For unimportant consumption matters, trial following awareness (as a result of exposure) may well be the simplest way to test the product rather than laboring over information seeking and evaluation. Thus, in the absence of buying goals or ego-involvement with the consumption situation, communication may work in a stimulus-response fashion; exposure may well be the key variable to product adoption (Krugman, 1965).

These two models of communication process appear to be in line with the "traditional" and "low commitment" views of communication effects (Robertson, 1973):

> The appropriateness of either model depends on the level of product commitment. For high commitment products, the traditional model with its underlying assumptions of an active audience critically evaluating messages and counter-messages and proceeding to purchase in a hierarchical response pattern is quite reasonable. For low commitment products, the appropriate view is that of a fairly passive consumer who does not seek nor critically evaluate most information and who may act in a simple awareness-trial response pattern (p. 16).

The two models suggest different advertising strategies. Messages about products for which consumers are likely to have buying goals (e.g., cars and furniture) and, therefore, to seek information and evaluate alternatives, should provide the consumer with evaluative information that would satisfy her information needs. For insignificant consumption matters for which consumers are not likely to seek and evaluate information (e.g., candy bars and paper towels), messages that contain humor, curiosity, novelty, and the like may be successful in getting the consumer's attention and interest her in trying the advertised product.

The author advocates the usefulness of buying-goal variables in future research, since buying goals are related to preferences for different amounts, kinds, and sources of information. Such research could suggest to advertisers whether information is relevant to desirable market segments, what kind of information is most relevant to them, and what channels should be used to make the information available to the consumer. This approach to studying communication parallels a point made over a decade ago by Wilbur Schrumm: "It is frequently more rewarding to learn how people use communication than to search for ways that communication 'uses' people."

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Table 1

Relationships Between Measures of Consumer-Buying Goals and Selected Communication Variables

Communication Variables	Rational Goals		Social Goals	
	Economic	Performance	Normative	Informational
Information Seeking	.11 (E)	.33[a] (E)	.38[a] (E)	.20[a] (E)
Evaluative Information				
a. Objective	.15[b] (E)	.36[a] (E)	.10	-.06
b. Social	.04	.16[b] (NP)	.28[a] (E)	.17[b] (E)
Source Credibility				
a. Informal Sources --friends and neighbors	.02	-.03 (O)	-.03 (O)	.41[a] (E)
b. Formal Sources --salespeople	-.06	.13[c] (E)	.06	-.06 (O)
--television advertisements	.06 (E)	-.10 (E)	.04 (E)	.16[b] (E)
--magazine and newspaper advertisements	.12[c] (E)	-.03 (E)	.13[c] (E)	.15[b] (E)
Specialized Media	.00	.00	.21[a] (E)	.02
Opinion Leadership	.13[c] (NP)	.04 (E)	.38[a] (E)	.21[a] (E)

[a] $p < .01$ E = Expected relationship

[b] $p < .05$ O = Opposite relationship

[c] $p < .10$ NP = Not predicted significant relationship

LIST OF MAIN VARIABLES USED IN THE PRESENT STUDY

VARIABLE	OPERATIONAL DEFINITION	MEASURE
Rational Goals: a. Economic	Price consciousness[1]	5-point agree-disagree scales. Items such as: "I find myself checking the prices of even small cosmetic items."
b. Performance	Perceived-performance risk[2]	5-point agree-disagree scales. Items such as: "When I consider buying new cosmetic products I often worry about how they are going to work for me."
Social Goals: a. Normative	Normative-social influence[3]	5-point agree-disagree scales. Items such as: "I am often concerned with the kinds of impressions friends may form of me because of the cosmetics I use."
b. Informational	Informational-social influence[3]	5-point agree-disagree scales. Items such as: "I often decide to buy those products that I see my friends using."
Information Seeking:	Expressed need to find out about six specific kinds of information prior to purchasing a new brand of each of the 5 selected products.[4]	30-point index: summary of total amount of information respondent requested on all five cosmetic products.
Evaluative Information:[5] a. Objective	Motivation to seek information on physical attributes of new brands.	5-point index representing the number of the selected 5 products for which the buyer would like to know about "Main differences between brands."
b. Social	Motivation to find out about life styles associated with the use of new brands.	5-point index representing the number of the 5 selected products for which the buyer would like to know about the "kinds of people who buy certain brands."
Source Credibility: a. Informal Sources --personal	Perceived importance of friends and neighbors as a source of information about the 5 selected products.	5-point index representing the number of products for which the buyer relies on friends and neighbors for information.
b. Formal Sources --personal	Perceived importance of sales-people as a source of information about the 5 selected products.	5-point index representing the number of products for which the respondent relies on salespeople for information.
--mass media	Perceived importance of television and print ads as sources of information about the 5 selected products.	5-point index representing the number of products for which the respondent relies on television and magazine or newspaper ads for information.
Specialized Media:	Self-reported names of fashion magazines read.	Open-ended response: Number of fashion magazines read "most regularly."
Opinion Leadership:	Self-reported influence on others[6]	5-point agree-disagree scales. Items such as: "I sometimes influence what cosmetics my friends buy."

[1] Four items similar to those used by Wells and Tigert (1971).

[2] Two items measuring the uncertainty and danger components of perceived risk (Cunningham, 1967).

[3] Four items based upon Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) definition.

[4] Definition is similar to Clarke's (1971). For external validity see Clarke (1973). New brand decisions were used because consumers have various amounts of information stored in their memory about existing familiar brands; and they are likely to look for something they do not already know.

[5] For meaning of "evaluative" information, see Cox (1963, pp. 62-63). The conceptions of "objective" and "social" information are adopted from Ward and Gibson (1969).

[6] Four items similar to those used by Reynolds and Darden (1971).